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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the sociological forces which have been identified in teacher development and to inquire into their role in teacher evaluation. To that end, a series of teacher development intervention programs and teacher interviews were conducted. This report describes the programs and interviews and highlights the most pertinent sociological findings held in common by the two areas of inquiry. Three major sociological phenomena studied were professional isolation, professional modesty, and the socialization of beginning teachers. The study uncovered sociological factors which limit or promote teacher evaluation activities. Because of professional isolation, teachers do not develop the skills and attitudes necessary for peer review, a key component of professional evaluation. Professional modesty prevents teacher support for, and involvement in, increased peer evaluation. Generalizations drawn from the interviews and programs provide the bases for several recommendations for educators interested in improved and increased teacher evaluation. (DWH)

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The Common Sociology Between Teacher Evaluation and Teacher Development

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THE COMMON SOCIOLOGY BETWEEN TEACHER EVALUATION AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Two currently prominent, somewhat independent issues concerning public school teachers are teacher evaluation and the professional development of teachers. The first topic is especially pertinent because of recent calls for reform in public schools. Current research in teacher evaluation focuses on technical problems, political forces, and sociological contexts which limit and structure evaluation. The second topic of teachers as professionals concerns the effective performance of teachers as they are shaped by the contexts and conditions of the classroom and school as workplaces. This research perspective emphasizes the growth of decision-making professionals who function in an organization which greatly afffects performance and attitudes through the sociological operations of expectations, rewards, relationships, and perceptions.

There is a great deal of commonality in sociological phenomena uncovered in the studies of teacher development and teacher evaluation. For example, the role and functions of evaluative feedback have much to do with understanding and providing for professional development, both when the experiences are positive and negative. Also, reasons as to why teacher evaluation is done (or, not done) in current practice are more understandable in light of social forces which interact with evaluation activities. The two topics have common specific sociological themes which have implications for research and practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore sociological forces which have been identified in teacher development, and to inquire into their role in teacher evaluation. To this end, a series of teacher development intervention programs and teacher interviews were conducted. The larger goal of the study was to better understand teacher evaluation, and to make recommendations about improved practice. This report will describe the programs, the interviews, and will highlight the most pertinent sociological findings held in common by the two areas of inquiry.

BACKGROUND

Researchers who have studied the work and life of teachers in public schools have identified a number of sociological phenomena which have great effects on the ways in which teachers grow and function as individual professionals. Some of the most prominent writers in this area include Lortie (1974), Wolf (1973), and Jackson (1974). Table I lists a number of the most important topics described by these researchers. Our studies have used these themes as a starting point for intervention programs, interviews, and interpretation of findings. Three major themes that began our studies were professional isolation, professional modesty, and socialization of beginning teachers.

Professional isolation of teachers has been well described by Lortie (1974). It results from the organization of public school education into classrooms or cells of instruction, and reward systems which have been built up around these units of school work. Reward systems have developed which preclude, or at least fail to encourage, teachers to move out of their immediate spheres of activity. Other social forces for isolation are the tradition of teaching as a personal, individual experience, and the lack of common technology found in other professions. A typical result of these forces is for teachers to sense that they should work alone, and to solely rely on the experiences of their own classrooms for feelings of accomplishment and meaning. Wolf (1974) extended the description of professional isolation to include the prevalence of distrust among teachers for persons who are not old associates. These feelings lead teachers to see evaluation as an activity which cannot include serious peer interaction, a threat rather than a source of reassurance, a task limited to individual classrooms rather than a general problem, having a vision of problems as demands for personal change and immediate solution rather than institutional improvement and long-term development, and a feeling of rugged individualism rather than a more clinical perspective.

Professional modesty wass a theme investigated in teacher interviews conducted by Wolf (1974). It especially is enforced by teachers in terms of innovations or quality of work. Essentially, it is bad practice to go public with exemplary practice or results. Recognition or demands for distinction are seen by teachers as too close to dreaded oneupsmanship. The result is that teachers are reluctant to share; the benefits of reassurance and reward are just not worth the accompanying threat to teachers who must rely upon each other for low levels of mutual support and absence of subversion. The apparent source of this sociological dynamic is that rewards, recognition, acknowledgement all are scarce in schools, and that teachers feel they should not compete for the little that is available. One reason for the lack of recognition is that there is not effective teacher evaluation which could document and make public the valuable work of teahers. However, professional modesty operates to minimize evaluation activity because teachers seek to avoid the very evaluation results which would serve to recognize teacher value. Teacher evaluation would result in much recognition of exemplary and meritorious work; it is just this result that teachers wish to avoid.

The third central social theme is that of the socialization of beginning teachers. A good number of writers including Lortie (1974), Salzillo et al. (1977), and Zeichner (1980) hae addressed this topic. First year teachers begin without a staged entry; they face the same problems and settings as the 20 year veteran. According to Lortie, a condition of this entry period is socialization in which support of the beginner is withheld until she or he proves themself to experienced teachers. Much of this time consists of trial by fire, and working out of professional

problems in isolation. When first year teachers begin to act and talk like their experienced colleagues (often in negative ways), they then begin to receive support, assistance, and perhaps most importantly, acceptance that is necessary to survive in the profession. During this period of time, beginning teachers lack authoritative reassurance from administrators or university mentors. The results of new teacher socialization are further isolation, lack of positive professional development, unsupportive relationships, and rewards limited to personal and private feelings from limited classroom experience. Another result is a profession that will not participate in serious peer evaluation.

THE STUDY

PURPOSE The purpose of the study was to uncover sociological factors (perceptions, expectations, relationships, rewards) which limit or promote teacher evaluation activities.

ACTIVITIES The study relied on interviews of public school personnel from six different settings: beginning teachers in two distinct programs, teachers in two peer visitation programs, experienced teachers who served as mentors in two programs, participants in a teacher-initiated inservice "center," teachers in a peer evaluation program, and a broad sample of public school teachers and principals in the state of Utah. Investigators designed and implemented one beginning teacher program, one visitation program, and one mentor program. The programs and interviews were conducted in school districts that differed greatly in terms of teacher-administrator initiative for programs: one district showed little teacher initiative, the other was characterized by energetic teacher involvement.

ANALYSIS Analysis largely consisted of conceptual-qualitative description of common themes in the diverse programs. The search was for identification of teacher sentiments, getting behind teacher perceptions, vocabulary, and for teacher reaction to given topics. The analysis must be considered preliminary to more focused study techniques.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Beginning teachers in a variety of settings expressed a sense of vulnerability to pressures from other school participants. The largest contributors to a sense of inadequacy were student discipline problems and the difficulties of planning. Combined with these demands was a lack of meaningful feedback from administrators and colleagues. Beginning teachers had strong desires for informal and formal evaluation, which were not available. They reported that support from experienced teachers often came after initial isolation in which the first year teachers had to work out many of their own problems.

Beginning teachers in an inservice support group reported that hearing each others problems was of some help in maintaining

perspective, but that specific feedback would be more useful. The support group also was seen as a place to learn specific needed performance techniques. The desireability of university participation in inservice programs for beginning teachers was expressed.

Need for mentoring systems was agreed upon by every teacher in the study. Availability of a mentor when needed by a beginning teacher was universally seen as a crucial resource; beyond this factor there was disagreement as to the role and function of mentors. Experienced mentors saw their primary role to be that of a friend, advisor, supporter, and available consultant. Beginning teachers who had mentors look much more to the experienced teacher for observation and concrete information on actual performance in the classroom. Beginning teachers sought quality judgements from mentors, which they rarely provided. Beginning teachers also differed from their mentors in that they wanted to observe the experienced teachers in action, mentors downplayed the value of this activity. The beginning teachers emphasized using their mentors for practical teaching methods, and linkage between theory from preservice programs and applications in the field. The actual experience along this line was a clear distinction between public school "realities" and the lack of relevance of preservice programs. Finally, over 30% of the beginning teachers who were interviewed in terms of mentor programs spontaneously mentioned alleviation of feelings of isolation as a main benefit of mentor programs. Frustrations of mentors centered around lack of time for their task, and absence of monetary or recognition rewards. Beginning teacher frustrations mainly were the lack of specfic feedback. Governance for mentor programs was seen by participants to best be shared by teachers, administrators, and universities.

While visitation programs were slow to build in terms of numbers, they received unanimous praise from participants. Initial solicitation for demonstration teachers (who had a specific exemplary classroom feature) carried out among 1600 elementary school teachers in one district resulted in only 20 nominations, among these were 18 given by principals. Participants in both visitation programs in both districts were unanimous in their description of visits as valuable professional contributions. The demonstration teachers saw the experience of teaching within their own classroom to be an important chance to receive feedback on their practices and ideas. The observers saw the visitation as a chance to get out of their "private world," to open up the teaching profession, and to talk with colleagues about the technical work of teachers (an opportunity not provided by the day-to-day contact of public schools). The observing teachers reported a boost of their morale, an expansion of ideas, and specific improvements in their instruction. All of the demonstration teachers felt that their selection was an effective method of acknowledgement of good teaching, 85% of the observing teachers agreed. Both groups saw visitation programs to be an outstanding inservice approach because of the credible information, positive feelings coming from the interchange (mainly

described as increased confidence for each), and breaking down of isolation.

Teacher center participants saw a main benefit of their activity to be a sense of initiative and variety among their colleagues. Clarification of specific problems was seen as a strength, although some frustration was expressed because of lack of specific solutions. Teacher organizers felt confirmed about their own ideas as a result of their initiative, but saw that their programs were limited by lack of available teacher time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Sociological themes suggested by teacher development researchers were readily apparent in interviews with teachers conducted in this study. In particular the topics of teacher isolation, professional modesty, and inadequate beginning teacher socialization were evident. While the various intervention strategies (beginning teacher support group, mentor program, visitation program) addressed the underlying sociological problems, they also provided a clearer picture of existing conditions in the profession. Specific measures of individual interventions were not included, so that conclusions cannot be made about their effectiveness. However, the positive response of participants suggests merit in development of such programs.

Connections between the sociological themes and impediments to increased teacher evaluation activity also were apparent. Professional isolation suggests that teachers will not develop the skills and attitudes necessary for peer review, a key component of sophisticated professional evaluation. The lack of perceived rewards for work outside of the classroom suggests little incentive for teachers to get involved in evaluation of their peers. Nonexistence of a common technical culture suggests that teachers perceive little in common upon which to base feedback or judgment procedures. The typical idea that teaching is a uniquely personal endeavor contributes to the attitude that evaluation must be overly subjective, and not helpful to one who has less than perfect understanding of each individual teaching situation. Thus, it is easy by looking at this sociological perspective to see why teachers see so little hope for effective evaluation practice. Another extension is that there is little value in teachers taking initative for developments in teacher evaluation.

Professional modesty presents another set of sentiments which act against teacher support for, and involvement in, increased teacher evaluation. Any practice which serves to highlight the work of individual teachers runs the risk of creating oneupsmanship, which in turn leads to withholding of colleague support. Since much, perhaps most, of teacher evaluation findings would be positive and outstanding, it is important to see how these findings would upset the delicate collegial interactions within a school site.

Teacher socialization effectively installs professional isolation and modesty in beginning teachers. It also changes the strong desire for feedback, reassurance, and judgment in first year teachers to an extreme reluctance to participate. While much of teachers' negative attitudes toward evaluation is understandable and attributable to bad experience, the pressure of seasoned teachers on the sentiments of beginning teachers for evaluation is readily apparent.

Generalization from the interviews and programs which constituted this study enables a number of recommendations for educators interested in improved and increased teacher evaluation:

--If effective sociological intervention is not a part of improved teacher evaluation programs, it is unlikely that even the most technically impressive assessment-judgment systems stands a chance to survive in the field.

--Beginning teachers who receive meaninful feedback, support from peers, and support from experienced teachers may constitute a first group of teachers for improved evaluation.

--A number of interventions can address problems of isolation, professional modesty, and "rugged individual" beginning teacher socialization.

--Teacher mentors should be trained to make connections between preservice programs and the practical realities of everyday classroom operation.

--Visitation programs are more acceptable to teachers if they highlight exemplary "practices" rather than a more global judgment of exemplary "teachers."

--Teacher initiative can be used to improve sociological conditions and teacher evaluation programs, however it must be supported by other educational agencies such as district and building administrators, universities, and state-level agencies.

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